

Environmental justice - All voices build better transportation solutions

WisDOT hosted a conference on February 18. The purpose of this full-day workshop was to help build a better understanding of the environmental justice process in southeastern Wisconsin. The workshop targeted community action groups, minority chambers of commerce, neighborhood organizations, low-income advocacy groups, consultants, contractors, local units of government and others participating in transportation decision-making processes.

The focus of the conference was:

Education - What it means to participate in the environmental justice process.

Partnerships - Who should be participating on a regular basis.

Participation - Why your organization should participate in the transportation planning process.

The workshop brought members of all aspects of the community to the same table. Participants included city, county, state and federal agencies, minority community members, consulting and contracting firms and groups such as the ACLU, Sierra Club and Wisconsin Transportation Builders Association. A total of 85 people attended the conference and the majority of them had great things to say about the day.

The day started with a welcome from Deputy Administrator Rory Rhinesmith and Deputy Secretary, Ruben Anthony, Jr. Donna Brown then explained the purpose of the day and let the participants go into their first session. The first session brought peers together to educate them about environmental justice and give them a chance to ask questions about related processes. Leaders of these sessions were Eugene Johnson from WisDOT DBE, Jim Thiel from Office of General Counsel and Mary McDonough-Bragg from FHWA. The groups then reconvened for lunch and a keynote speaker, Mary McDonough-Bragg, Team Leader of FHWA's Midwestern Resource Center, Planning and Environmental Team. After lunch, the participants broke into small, diverse groups to work out a hypothetical transportation and environmental situation. The groups worked through the session by identifying the communities affected, community characteristics, project alternatives and how to involve the public in decision-making processes. The participants then regrouped, shared their findings and discussed what to do from there. Donna Brown and Mary McDonough-Bragg then worked together to review the day and discuss what came out of the workshop. Les Fafard wrapped up the day and thanked everyone for participating.

The committee that made the conference possible and the day a success included members from all divisions of WisDOT, FHWA and consultants. The committee would also like to thank all of the attendees from the different divisions. You helped make the day a success as well. "It was great to see so many different people there. The day was definitely a success and was a big step to improving our relationships with the surrounding communities. Hopefully we can continue to hold similar sessions and build on these relationships," said Donna Brown about the conference.

For those that could not attend, a summary report from the day and materials will be made available soon. If you are interested in receiving these materials, please contact Amanda Riddell.